

In light of the action taken by the Subcommittee on Europe and just now by the House, which endorsed the Baltic States for membership in NATO, I believe this resolution is complimentary to H. Res. 468 and should be adopted.

The resolution endorses the candidacies of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania for NATO membership and discusses in detail why the three Baltic nations deserve to be invited into the alliance.

Mr. Speaker, last year, the Baltic nations celebrated the 10th anniversary of the resumption of their independence after a long period of Soviet dominance. The changes which have taken place in those countries has been amazing in every aspect. The total political, economic and social transformation they have gone through in preparation for NATO and EU membership has been impressive, and they deserve to be recognized for their accomplishments by being invited to join the alliance.

The author of this legislation, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. SHIMKUS), has long been a supporter and spokesman for the Baltics, serving as the chairman of the Baltic Caucus in the House. He has given tireless devotion to promoting these countries and their accomplishments. Passage of this resolution is as much about his dedication as it is about theirs.

Mr. Speaker, I do not believe there could be any better additions to the NATO alliance than these three nations, and I urge the adoption of the resolution.

Mr. TERRY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H. Con. Res. 116 to recommend the integration of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Since its inception in 1949, NATO has served as a vehicle for peace and stability throughout Europe. While the imminent threat of the Warsaw Pact has passed, one need not look far to see the continued utility of NATO. Far from becoming a defunct organization when the Berlin wall fell 13 years ago, NATO has adapted to the changing security dynamics of the post-cold war era and has continued to be a means through which we can achieve peace in Europe.

One of the most measurable successes of NATO is the eagerness of former Warsaw Pact countries and former Republics of the Soviet Union to join the western alliance. Three years ago, we officially welcomed Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. At the Prague Summit in November the alliance will once again consider expanding its membership. We should recognize the tremendous gains the states of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia have made by accepting them into the NATO fold.

Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia have all individually made extraordinary advances toward democracy and free market principles. Each has successfully thrown off the yoke of Soviet oppression and has instituted government structures that assure freedom and rule of law for their citizens. Each has demonstrated a respect for human rights and a desire to be oriented toward the freedom-loving states of the

West. Each has actively worked to achieve the standards necessary for accession into NATO, and each has succeeded in this endeavor.

Membership in NATO will help cement the progress the Baltic states have made since achieving independence in 1991. More importantly, NATO expansion to incorporate the Baltic states, as former republics of the Soviet Union, will serve to strengthen the alliance in its mission to secure peace and security in the Euro-Atlantic region.

As a member of the House Baltic Caucus, I applaud the strides that Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia have made and urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this resolution.

Mr. SHIMKUS. Mr. Speaker, as an American of Lithuanian decent, and cochairman of the House Baltic Caucus, it is with great pride that I rise today in support of H. Con. Res. 116. This resolution supports the integration of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia into NATO.

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, I believe it is even more important than ever to secure Europe through NATO enlargement. This past year there has been a fundamental shift in the argument over NATO membership. We are no longer questioning "if" NATO will expand, we are asking "who" will be invited to join in 2002. In a major foreign policy address at Warsaw University on June 15, 2001, President George W. Bush spoke decisively for enlarging NATO to include the Baltic nations when he said, "All the new democracies, from the Baltic to the Black Sea, should have the same chance for security and freedom to join the institutions of Europe." Now, even the NATO defense ministers are telling the press that the decision has already been made to invite the Baltic countries to join at the Prague Summit next month.

When considering H. Con. Res. 116, it is important to remember the Baltic's history. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia lost their independence in 1940 after the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact that placed the Baltic States in the Soviet sphere of influence. The United States never recognized the legitimacy of the Soviet occupation. For over 50 years, the Baltic people endured unspeakable horrors under Stalin's totalitarian regime. With incredible tenacity and bravery, they resisted occupation. In 1991 they reasserted their independence, causing the domino effect that led the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia are among the greatest success stories of post-communist Europe. Against all odds, in the decade since they regained independence, the Baltic countries have established stable democratic governments, free market economic systems, and exemplary respect for human rights and civil liberties. With reoccupation a possible long-term threat, they have turned their efforts toward security which can only be achieved by joining NATO.

Submitting their applications for NATO membership in 1994, the Baltics have already been contributing as if they were members of the alliance. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia have all sent troops to assist the European peacekeeping efforts under NATO, the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, as well as essential linguistic support for the current campaign against terrorism. Despite their modest budgets and tremendous social needs, each country has committed itself to spending 2 percent

of its GDP on military preparations in compliance with the membership action plan (MAP). This is remarkable because in comparison, many NATO members, including Germany, do not currently spend 2 percent of their GDP on defense. H. Con. Res. 116 backs Baltic membership contingent on the completion of the membership action plan (MAP) requirements, which they have been vigorously pursuing.

There are some who argue that Baltic membership in NATO will cause a dangerous tension with Russia. I respectfully disagree. Expanding the umbrella of protection to the Baltics will never pose a threat to Russia. Instead it will enhance stability to Moscow's west, which is to Russia's advantage. In the recent past, Russia raised the same complaints about Poland's candidacy, and now that Poland has joined the alliance, the two countries have a better relationship than ever before. Baltic inclusion into NATO will have the same effect. Baltic membership might temporarily wound Russian pride, but it will be beneficial in the long term, forcing Russia to focus on its ailing economy, not its geopolitical situation.

Moreover, in light of the terrorist attacks, Russia seems to be accepting Baltic membership. On October 3, 2001 Russian President Vladimir Putin stated in Brussels that he is prepared to reconsider Russia's opposition to NATO enlargement. Putin stated that September 11th has brought relations between Russian and the West to a "new level."

While relations between the United States and the Baltic countries are very strong, the Baltics feel like the west abandoned them in exchange for peace with Moscow after World War II. If we fail to extend NATO membership to the Baltics in this round of enlargement, they will believe that we have scarified them once again. It would stall the reform movements underway which are fueled by hope for NATO membership and could cause instability in the region.

I introduced H. Con. Res. 116 because it is very important for the House of Representatives to send a message to NATO leaders before the 2002 summit that the United States stands firmly behind the Baltics' candidacy. Only NATO membership will enhance security in Europe. Until they are invited to join, the Baltic region will remain ripe for crises that could contaminate the United States-Russian relationship and threaten European security. For these reasons, I ask you to vote for H. Con. Res. 116.

Mr. GALLEGLY. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PETRI). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. GALLEGLY) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution, H. Con. Res. 116.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the concurrent resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

RECOMMENDING THE INTEGRATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVAKIA INTO THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION (NATO)

Mr. GALLEGLY. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to

the resolution (H. Res. 253) recommending the integration of the Republic of Slovakia into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

#### H. RES. 253

Whereas the Slovak Republic came into existence in 1993 after a peaceful division of Czechoslovakia;

Whereas Slovakia has consistently conducted peaceful transfers of political power;

Whereas Slovakia has demonstrated the maturity of its democracy in democratic, free and fair elections of September 2002 with high voter turnout;

Whereas Slovakia has shown a consistent record of progress in the areas of human rights, civil society, and a free market economy;

Whereas Slovakia's past government (1998-2002), which included three ethnic Hungarians, including a Deputy Prime Minister, demonstrated its commitment to improved relations with national minorities;

Whereas Slovakia reconfirmed its ability to address issues of the past, including the recent decision of its Government to compensate the Holocaust victims;

Whereas Slovakia has continually worked to retain civilian control of its military through active participation with North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces, and the members of the North Atlantic community have cooperated closely with the military of Slovakia in its reform;

Whereas Slovakia has demonstrated its ability to operate with the military forces of NATO members within activities of the Partnership for Peace program and participated in missions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo;

Whereas Slovakia sent its troops to Afghanistan in support of the war against terrorism and Operation Enduring Freedom;

Whereas Slovakia, geographically located in a strategically significant position, contributed within the framework of Visegrad Four together with its neighbors, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland—all members of NATO since 1999—to regional security and stability; and

Whereas NATO will consider at its 2002 summit meeting in Prague extension of invitations to new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe to join the Alliance: Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved*, That it is the sense of the House of Representatives that—

(1) the Slovak Republic should be commended for progressing toward political and economic liberty and for its efforts to meet the guidelines for prospective North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members set out in Chapter 5 of the September 1995 Study on NATO Enlargement;

(2) Slovakia would make significant contributions to furthering the goals of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization;

(3) extension of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to include Slovakia would significantly contribute to security and peace of Europe and the region as a whole; and

(4) Slovakia should be invited to be a full member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization alliance at the NATO 2002 summit in Prague.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. GALLEGLY) and the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATSON) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. GALLEGLY).

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. GALLEGLY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H. Res. 253.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. GALLEGLY. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH).

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I thank my good friend, the gentleman from California (Chairman GALLEGLY), for yielding me time.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H. Res. 253, recommending the integration of Slovakia into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

In my years of service with the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, I have observed the sometimes difficult transition to democracy of this Central European country. It has been very difficult for them. It was because of Slovakia's own authoritarian leaders, most notably Vladimir Meciar, that Slovakia was rightly excluded from the accession process in 1997. Today, it is thanks to a new generation of bright and enlightened Slovak leaders that that situation has dramatically been reversed.

To the credit of the Dzurinda government, many important changes have already been undertaken. The support of the U.S. Congress for Slovakia's admission to NATO reflects the deep respect my colleagues and all of us have for these remarkable achievements.

Let me just say to my colleagues that the reform process in Slovakia should not end with the Prague-NATO summit. On the contrary, the long-term well-being of Slovakia requires that this process continue and indeed intensify after November.

In this regard, there are three areas that I believe deserve particular attention.

First, the most recent elections clearly demonstrate Slovakia's ability to elect pro-democracy, pro-western governments that respect the sacredness and sanctity of human life. The results of the 1998 elections were not a fluke but an illustration of real and meaningful democratic transition that first found its voice in civil society and then in the government itself. The question now is whether that maturity will also be found in a loyal opposition in the parliament, one that by definition has policy differences from time to time from the ruling coalition, but whose ultimate interest is in serving the Slovak people.

Second, the Slovakia government must make headway in fighting corruption. Unless and until that happens, the rule of law will remain weak, economic development will go to other countries, and justice will be elusive.

Finally, Slovak leaders must address in earnest the scourge of racism

against the Roma. This problem, as we all know, is not unique to Slovakia. While other countries in the region have moved to counter the most alarming manifestations of hatred and intolerance, violent attacks, Slovakia has failed to bring these attacks under control. The NATO Participation Act of 1994, I would remind my colleagues, which all of us supported, made clear that "participants in the Partnership for Peace should be invited to become full NATO Members if they remain committed to protecting the rights of all of their citizens." So we make a strong appeal to the Slovak leadership, please, undertake aggressive efforts to protect the Roma.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank again my good friend for his leadership on this issue.

Ms. WATSON of California. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume, and I rise in strong support of this resolution.

Mr. Speaker, I first would like to commend my good friend and colleague, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. STUPAK), for introducing this important resolution.

Mr. Speaker, just a few minutes ago we considered H. Res. 468, which endorses membership in NATO for the Slovak Republic, along with six other applicants. This resolution before us highlights the political, economic and foreign policy accomplishments of the Slovak Republic since its "velvet" divorce from the Czech Republic in 1993 and specifically endorses its NATO membership.

Slovakia did not have an easy beginning as an independent country. Its first post-independence government stalled on political and economic reforms, in stark contrast to its neighbors to the north, west and south. But the people of Slovakia elected a reform-minded government in 1998, which quickly moved to anchor Slovakia in the West, made NATO membership a cornerstone of its foreign policy and joined the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland in a regional, political and economic grouping.

The Slovak Republic has not only shown progress in the area of free market economy, but it also began to address different issues of the past, such as Jewish property restitution and compensation to the victims of the Holocaust. Relations with the ethnic Hungarian minority have also improved, and the previous government included three ethnic Hungarians as ministers. Although much more remains to be done in this area, I believe that membership in NATO will reinforce the message that the just treatment of national minorities is a key aspect of membership.

The Slovak government has already demonstrated that it is interested in the ability to join NATO, first by participating in the SFOR and the KFOR operations, and by sending its troops to Afghanistan.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. STUPAK), the sponsor of this resolution.

Mr. STUPAK. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding me time for this opportunity to speak in support of expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Mr. Speaker, I introduced H. Res. 253 to commend the Slovak Republic for its progress towards political and economic liberty and efforts to meet the guidelines of prospective NATO membership. Slovakia, once an authoritative regime, embraced a pro-western government in 1998 and freed its citizens from international isolation.

On September 21, 2002, the Slovak government successfully held the third free and fair elections since its independence. Over 70 percent of the eligible voters turned out to express their new-found democratic right.

The Slovak Republic now stands ready to play an integral part in defense of the free world. As a member of NATO, Slovakia would contribute to protection of member states and significantly benefit the security and peace of Europe and the region as a whole. Slovakia's leaders value the prospect of serving in our military alliance, while its citizens align themselves with NATO's common values and democratic mission.

The NATO summit to discuss enlargement is scheduled for November 23, 2002, in Prague. That is why this resolution is so timely.

I thank the chairman, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. HYDE); the ranking member, the gentleman from California (Mr. LANTOS); the subcommittee chairman, the gentleman from California (Mr. GALLEGLY); and the ranking member, the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. HILLIARD) for moving this resolution forward, because this resolution demonstrates that, among the other European countries vying for membership, Slovakia boasts the highest gross domestic product and a key geographical advantage, surrounded by other NATO member states.

Let us send a clear message that Slovakia would make an excellent partner and deserves to be counted among the newest members of NATO.

On a personal note, my ancestors are from Slovakia, so I am proud to present this resolution to the House for its consideration today.

So I ask all Members to support H. Res. 253 and urge our international community to give Slovakia's bid for NATO membership new consideration.

Mr. GALLEGLY. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 3 minutes.

Mr. Speaker, H. Res. 253 was introduced by our previous speaker, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. STUPAK), and endorses the candidacy of Slovakia for NATO membership. In light of the action about to be taken by the House, I believe this resolution is complimentary to H. Res. 468 and elaborates the reasons why Slovakia should be included in NATO.

□ 1745

Five years ago, Slovakia was seriously under consideration for NATO membership, but was denied due to the government in power at the time. That government was subsequently replaced, but it threatened to return to power this year, again calling into question Slovakia's candidacy. However, Slovakia just recently held a very important national election and the current government has been returned to office. The outcome of the elections were one of the keys to the status of Slovakia's application to NATO. The election results did come out to everyone's satisfaction, and that has lessened the apprehensions about Slovakia's commitment to NATO.

Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the people of Slovakia for their strong showing in the election. Over 70 percent of the voting population actually voted. I also want to commend the work of our ambassador, Ron Weiser, and his entire embassy staff for their efforts to encourage a strong voter turnout.

Mr. Speaker, I urge the adoption of this resolution.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. WATSON of California. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. GALLEGLY. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from New York (Mr. GILMAN), the chairman emeritus of the Committee on International Relations.

(Mr. GILMAN asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank our distinguished Committee on International Relations subcommittee chairman, the gentleman from California (Mr. GALLEGLY), for his diligent work in bringing H. Res. 486, the Transatlantic Security and NATO Enlargement Act, before us for consideration today. As a cosponsor of that resolution, it is my firm belief that NATO enlargement will not only affirm the importance of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Act, but it will contribute to the stability and security of Europe and preserve and enhance its ability to effectively combat the scourge of terrorism.

Today, the case for NATO enlargement is stronger than ever before. The September 11 attacks have reminded us of the common interests we share with our European allies. Thus, not only will NATO enlargement contribute to the process of integration that has helped us stabilize Europe over the past 50 years, but it will also help promote the development of strong new allies in our war on terrorism.

Far from backing away from NATO enlargement, we should welcome all of those European democracies whose po-

litical stability, military contributions, and commitment to NATO's solidarity would be assets to the alliance. Each of the candidate countries have made remarkable progress in transitioning to Western-style democracies and free market economies. While each nation's challenge is different, they share a common thread: the desire to adopt a pluralistic form of democracy that respects human and civil rights, practices tolerance for ethnic and religious diversity, and demonstrates a healthy respect for the rule of law. They should be commended for both their accomplishments and their continued pursuit of these goals.

Accordingly, I wish to strongly urge my colleagues to support this important resolution. Now, more than ever, we must pursue a wider, integrated NATO.

Mr. GALLEGLY. Mr. Speaker, we have no further requests for time. At this point I would urge my colleagues to support the adoption of this resolution.

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join my colleagues in support of H. Res. 253 recommending the integration of the Republic of Slovakia into NATO.

The people of the Slovak Republic understand the importance of national security and having the ability to maintain their national identity and sovereignty. Time and time again over the past centuries the Slovak people have been denied their independence. That is why they value the protection and security offered by membership in NATO.

The Slovak Republic has made great strides and significant progress since its peaceful separation from the Czech Republic in 1993. While the transition to a newly independent nation has been at times difficult, the Slovak people are heroes who have survived imposed monarchy, fascism, communism and forced integration. The Slovak people are heroes again even in the face of economic challenges and all the problems of transforming a state economy into a free market and free enterprise society—they again displayed their courage to align with the West, free institutions and democracy. Therefore, it is fitting today that the United States Congress express its support for the people of Slovakia and their newly independent nation to join in the security afforded by the NATO organization.

My hope is that Slovaks independence will be protected and preserved for future generations by its integration into NATO.

I am pleased to join as a cosponsor of this legislative resolution. I am pleased to be the grandson of Slovak immigrants to the United States. May God Bless the Slovak people and May God Bless the United States in these difficult times of national security.

Mr. GALLEGLY. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PETRI). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. GALLEGLY) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 253, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the resolution, as amended, was agreed to.

The title of the resolution was amended so as to read: "Resolution recommending the integration of the Slovak Republic into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

# VETERANS' COMPENSATION COST-OF-LIVING ADJUSTMENT ACT OF 2002

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and concur in the Senate amendments to the bill (H.R. 4085) to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide a cost-of-living increase in the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disability and dependency and indemnity compensation for surviving spouses of such veterans, to expand certain benefits for veterans and their survivors, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read as follows:

Senate amendments:

Strike out all after the enacting clause and insert:

## SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

*This Act may be cited as the "Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2002".*

## SEC. 2. INCREASE IN RATES OF DISABILITY COMPENSATION AND DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION.

(a) **RATE ADJUSTMENT.**—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall, effective on December 1, 2002, increase the dollar amounts in effect for the payment of disability compensation and dependency and indemnity compensation by the Secretary, as specified in subsection (b).

(b) **AMOUNTS TO BE INCREASED.**—The dollar amounts to be increased pursuant to subsection (a) are the following:

(1) **COMPENSATION.**—Each of the dollar amounts in effect under section 1114 of title 38, United States Code.

(2) **ADDITIONAL COMPENSATION FOR DEPENDENTS.**—Each of the dollar amounts in effect under section 1115(1) of such title.

(3) **CLOTHING ALLOWANCE.**—The dollar amount in effect under section 1162 of such title.

(4) **NEW DIC RATES.**—The dollar amounts in effect under paragraphs (1) and (2) of section 1311(a) of such title.

(5) **OLD DIC RATES.**—Each of the dollar amounts in effect under section 1311(a)(3) of such title.

(6) **ADDITIONAL DIC FOR SURVIVING SPOUSES WITH MINOR CHILDREN.**—The dollar amount in effect under section 1311(b) of such title.

(7) **ADDITIONAL DIC FOR DISABILITY.**—The dollar amounts in effect under sections 1311(c) and 1311(d) of such title.

(8) **DIC FOR DEPENDENT CHILDREN.**—The dollar amounts in effect under sections 1313(a) and 1314 of such title.

(c) **DETERMINATION OF INCREASE.**—(1) The increase under subsection (a) shall be made in the dollar amounts specified in subsection (b) as in effect on November 30, 2002.

(2) Except as provided in paragraph (3), each such amount shall be increased by the same percentage as the percentage by which benefit amounts payable under title II of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 401 et seq.) are increased effective December 1, 2002, as a result of a determination under section 215(i) of such Act (42 U.S.C. 415(i)).

(3) Each dollar amount increased pursuant to paragraph (2) shall, if not a whole dollar amount, be rounded down to the next lower whole dollar amount.

(d) **SPECIAL RULE.**—The Secretary may adjust administratively, consistent with the increases

made under subsection (a), the rates of disability compensation payable to persons within the purview of section 10 of Public Law 85-857 (72 Stat. 1263) who are not in receipt of compensation payable pursuant to chapter 11 of title 38, United States Code.

## SEC. 3. PUBLICATION OF ADJUSTED RATES.

At the same time as the matters specified in section 215(i)(2)(D) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 415(i)(2)(D)) are required to be published by reason of a determination made under section 215(i) of such Act during fiscal year 2003, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall publish in the Federal Register the amounts specified in subsection (b) of section 2, as increased pursuant to that section.

Amend the title so as to read: "An Act to increase, effective as of December 1, 2002, the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for the survivors of certain disabled veterans."

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH).

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 4085, the Veterans' Compensation Cost of Living Adjustment Act of 2002, will provide a cost of living adjustment to disabled veterans and surviving spouses. The amount of the increase will be calculated using the same percentage applicable to Social Security benefits. The percentage amount should be announced later on this week and will be around 1.5 to 2 percent. Upon enactment of this vital legislation, all veterans or qualified survivors of veterans who receive disability compensation payments will receive the COLA effective December 1 of this year.

Mr. Speaker, the House originally passed this COLA legislation back in May with a number of other very important provisions. On September 26, however, the Senate struck out those other provisions and sent us back the bill that is before us today. While I am urging my colleagues to support H.R. 4085, as amended, I want to assure them that we are continuing to work with our colleagues in the other body to reach agreement on these other vital provisions.

Specifically, those provisions would:

Authorize dependency and indemnity compensation benefits for the surviving spouse of a veteran who remarries after attaining the age of 65. These surviving spouses would also be eligible for supplemental VA-sponsored health coverage, education, and housing loan benefits to the same extent as if they had not remarried.

We also saw a provision stripped out that we again will seek to find another home that reduced the home loan fee charges qualifying members of the Selected Reserve to the same level charged active-duty veterans.

We also had a provision dealing with increased veterans' mortgage life insurance coverage from \$90,000 to

\$150,000; and authorized veterans over the age of 70 to continue coverage under the veterans' mortgage life insurance.

The House bill, Mr. Speaker, also contained a provision to authorize funding for State-approving agencies, the entities that are responsible for certifying schools' eligibility for participation in the Montgomery GI Bill for the next 3 years. Because of the urgency of continuing their funding, following consideration of H.R. 4085, we will shortly take up legislation that provides a 1-year authorization.

Mr. Speaker, as this session draws to a close, I am hopeful that we will see action completed on these and a number of important veterans measures that the House has passed, but that have not been acted on by the other body. Among the House bills still pending in the other body are:

Number one, H.R. 3253, the Department of Veterans Affairs Emergency Preparedness Act of 2002, which would expand the Department of VA's role in homeland security, creating new research centers to counter biological, chemical, and radiological terrorism. H.R. 3253 originally passed the House on May 20 and was subsequently amended and approved by the Senate on August 1. After intensive negotiations with our colleagues in the Senate, a compromise agreement was reached by both sides, and the House agreed to the compromise version on September 17. We are now awaiting action by the Senate on this legislation.

Number two, H.R. 3645, the Veterans Health Care and Procurement Improvement Act of 2002 passed the House on July 22, which would reform VA health care procurement practices, expand access to VA health care services to Filipino veterans, World War II veterans, and provide additional dental services to former POWs.

Number three, H.R. 4015, the Jobs for Veterans Act, passed the House on May 21 and would reform veterans job training and placement programs in the Department of Labor through a new system of incentives and accountability.

Number four, H.R. 3423 would reform eligibility for burial at Arlington National Cemetery and was passed by the House on December 20 of last year. This legislation makes a couple of commonsense changes to recognize that reservists who die in the line of duty or who would qualify for burial but for their age at death, deserve the honor of an Arlington burial should they and their families so choose.

Number five, H.R. 4940, the Arlington National Cemetery Burial Eligibility Act, passed the House on July 22nd. This is the third time that the House has approved a comprehensive review and overhaul of Arlington's rules, and we will continue to work with our colleagues in the other body on this major legislation.

Number six, H.R. 5055, legislation to authorize a memorial marker in Arlington National Cemetery honoring